

# PAINE AND DICKINSON

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At the time of the outbreak of the American Revolution, there existed in the thirteen colonies a close relationship between ideals and ideologies, the latter of which have appropriately been called the "political expression" of the former. The two men who have been considered the foremost propagandists of this revolution, John Dickinson and Thomas Paine, shared the same fundamental ideology even though they disagreed on some matters of tactics and even though the propaganda techniques in the Farmer's *Letters* and *Common Sense* have very little in common.

My primary concern in this paper is with ideology, but in addition I propose to compare the style of Dickinson's Farmer's *Letters* and Paine's *Common Sense*, as well as their respective methods of diffusion, and to reveal major parallels between Paine's *Rights of Man* and Dickinson's later work, his two series of *Letters of Fabius*.

Although Dickinson and Paine knew each other personally and both ended their political careers as staunch defenders of the administration of their mutual friend Thomas Jefferson, they are practically never considered as kindred figures in political or intellectual history. Biographers of either man uniformly ignore the other. The notable exception is Moncure D. Conway, a graduate of Dickinson College and the author of the first biography of Paine to be based on extensive original research. Conway told how "honest John Dickinson" helped obtain a financial grant for Paine from the state of Pennsylvania. Most modern historical works making any comparisons between Paine and Dickinson erroneously suggest that their political systems were antithetical.

It cannot be denied that historical figures frequently become symbols of economic and political ideologies. Franklin and Jefferson on one side, Hamilton and Adams on the other, do represent concrete political attitudes, and their followers in political life have magnified their differences by forming opposing factions. These are not dichoto-

mies artificially imposed by historians many years after the events in which these figures participated. To their contemporaries and near-contemporaries, these men stood for separate political philosophies as different from each other as the systems of Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke. On the American scene, Paine may without much discussion be ranked on the side of Franklin and Jefferson. It is appropriate to view Dickinson in the same context in order to determine whether he belongs with Adams or with Jefferson. Historians have had difficulty in correctly placing Dickinson because of one major event in his life, his decision not to support the Declaration of Independence in the Second Continental Congress. This decision, Dickinson later maintained, was based primarily on timing, on his personal appraisal of the wretched state of unpreparedness of the colonies.<sup>1</sup> In voting against independence, Dickinson indeed temporarily enrolled himself in a camp opposite from that of Thomas Paine. Because of the cautious legalism of much of his writing, moreover, Dickinson has frequently been compared to Burke, and it is easy to understand why the impression has been created that his thought is inimical to Paine's. The related belief has grown up that throughout his career Dickinson habitually appealed to history and legal precedent rather than to natural law and natural rights. This interpretation, however, is not supported by the facts. Not only was Dickinson not the American Burke, but his mature political philosophy was essentially the same as that of Thomas Paine. Dickinson himself recognized the similarity in their fundamental views, and he declared it emphatically.

At first glance the two men seem to have resembled each other only in their life span. Dickinson was born in 1732—Paine five years later. Dickinson died in 1808 and Paine the following year. But Dickinson saw the light in surroundings of ease and affluence, Paine amid poverty and proletarian strife. Dickinson during most of his life held high political office and his prestige was never challenged. Even his political opponents treated him with the utmost deference. Paine, however, was as much reviled as respected throughout his entire public career. Although he exerted considerable political influence at various times and places, he worked almost invariably behind the scenes, and he never held an elected office in America. Early in the Revolution he served as the paid secretary of the committee of foreign affairs of the Congress and later as clerk of the Assembly of Pennsylvania. Dickinson held any number of elected offices including that of President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. Paine was on close enough terms to be invited to dine at the president's table at least once when the question of the recompense of his services during the Revolution was being considered. Dickinson reported to the council of the

state that he and Washington had discussed Paine's financial status and that both desired that provision be made for him. On another occasion both Paine and Dickinson were present at a spectacular fête in Philadelphia to celebrate the birth of the Dauphin of France. Benjamin Rush, who reported their presence, added that Paine "retired frequently from company to analyze his thoughts and to enjoy the repast of his own original ideas."

A minor episode involving the return of Congress from Princeton to Philadelphia in 1783 reveals Paine's support of Dickinson in local politics. In a letter to Rush concerning rival addresses to the citizens of Philadelphia, Paine described one which he had himself drawn up as initiated by "those whom Mr. Dickinson have very good reason to believe his friends, and who intend it as a softening healing measure to all sides." In 1805 after Paine returned to the United States from France, he paid a merited tribute to Dickinson. In the midst of his attacks on the politicians "who once figured as leaders under the assumed and fraudulent name of *federalism*," he particularly complimented those who had since gone "into honorable and peaceable retirement, like *John Dickinson* and *Charles Thompson*."

Both Paine and Dickinson were at one time associated with a Quaker environment, and in mature life both questioned conventional Christian doctrine. Paine's religion is a complicated subject, but one may certainly say that during most of his adult years he accepted deistical principles. Dickinson late in his career expressed belief in Christianity, but also admitted, "I am not, and probably never shall be, united to any religious Society, because each of them, as a society, hold principles which I cannot adopt."<sup>2</sup>

As early as 1765 in his writings on the Stamp Act, Dickinson revealed traces of the political ideology which would make him comfortable with the system of Paine and Jefferson at the end of the century. A recent scholar has pointed out that in opposing the Stamp Act, Dickinson did not, as most historians maintain, depend upon legalistic logic or appeals to precedent, but offered instead "a clearly articulated theory of natural rights—to be happy, to be free, and to be secure in one's property."<sup>3</sup> His various defenses of American rights were not based upon charters or compacts, but upon "immutable maxims of reason and justice." In a work of 1766 written under the pseudonym of a "North American," Dickinson described rights in the following terms: "They are created in us by the decrees of Providence, which establish the laws of our nature. They are born with us; exists within us; and cannot be taken from us by any human power."<sup>4</sup> One could readily accept these words as being taken from the works of Thomas Paine.

Exactly the same presuppositions figure in Dickinson's Farmer's *Letters* of 1767, and many of the phrases in this his most popular work recall his arguments of the preceding years. "The colonists, and men everywhere, enjoyed a basic right to be happy, they could not 'be happy, without being free,' and they could not be free unless secure in their property. Dickinson argued, as he had three years before, that American rights had been 'created . . . by the decrees of Providence, which establish the laws of our nature.'"<sup>5</sup> Despite many recent interpretations that see very little in the Farmer's *Letters* except resistance to Parliamentary taxation for the purpose of revenue rather than the control of trade, they actually stress freedom and natural rights. They make use of standard Whig themes such as the threat to liberty by executive control over assemblies, the danger of losing the right of voluntary taxation, the evils inherent in establishing the precedent of a revenue tax, the record of ministerial injustice, and the horrors of bureaucracy, corruption, and a standing army. Dickinson states his argument forthrightly and does not hedge it with legalistic refinements, and whenever he cites precedents he does so in order to show that traditions may be wrong and pernicious. In other words, Dickinson even in the 1760's shows little resemblance to Edmund Burke of the 1790's. So forceful was Dickinson's style that the Tory *Critical Review* in England "accused the Farmer of inciting the colonies to independence."<sup>6</sup>

Although the Farmer's *Letters* and *Common Sense* are based on similar presuppositions and are rightly considered as the two most successful propaganda pieces of the American Revolution, their stylistic techniques reveal important differences. Dickinson writes in the vein of an Addisonian essay; Paine in that of a Swiftian tract. Dickinson adopts the device of an invented character as the presumed author; in the words of his opening sentence, he is "a farmer settled after a variety of fortunes, near the banks of the river Delaware, in the province of Pennsylvania." Paine in contrary fashion bluntly asserts, "Who the Author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the Object for Attention is the *Doctrine itself*, not the *Man*."

As Dickinson introduces himself in the character of the Pennsylvania farmer, he seems to be a colonial Montesquieu. He casually reveals that his servants are few and that he spends most his time in his library, which is the most valuable part of his small estate. These details put his readers at ease by explaining, as he subsequently indicates, how it is that he has acquired more knowledge in history, law, and the constitution of his country than most men of his class. Paine keeps his personality as the author completely submerged, but he uses a style and

vocabulary to suggest that he is a common man as well as an exponent of common sense.

Dickinson's style is in its way as forceful as Paine's but it incorporates a different manner of insistence. Dickinson announces his themes, states them, and comes back to them repeatedly. Paine relies on single presentations, occasionally drawn out, but usually short and self-contained. He makes one point and then passes on rapidly to another.

Without question Paine's subject matter is more philosophical and of more universal interest than Dickinson's. Much of *Common Sense* represents pure ideology, based on theoretical reasoning and abstract principles. The Farmer's *Letters*, on the other hand, are entirely pragmatic, treating issues, conditions, and personalities of the immediate time and specific place. Paine probes such basic concepts as the presumed state of nature, the origin of government, and the basic principles of monarchy, hereditary succession, and republicanism. Dickinson confines himself to such particular and specific issues as taxation without representation, the authority of Parliament to regulate trade, but not to raise revenue, the distinction between external and internal taxes, and the relationship between virtue and liberty. Dickinson's letters have exclusive and continuous reference to the thirteen British colonies in America. Paine's pamphlet interprets the situation of the colonies as an illustration of principles that relate to the fundamental interests of all mankind. The two writers touch common ground mainly in attempting to rouse their countrymen to contemplate the imminent ruin confronting them; to take immediate action, not wait for the future; and to recognize the common bond of unity joining the thirteen colonies. The major example of verbal similarity between the Farmer's *Letters* and *Common Sense* exists in their common expression of the principle of solidarity. Dickinson says of the colonies, "the cause of one is the cause of all" (Letter I). Paine enlarges the prospect, declaring "the cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind."

Most hortatory works published in colonial America were oriented toward either the Greek and Roman classics or the Christian Scriptures, and many authors leaned in both directions. Since Dickinson was one of the most dedicated classicists on the American continent, it is not strange that he should embellish his letters with appropriate allusions to the ancients. Indeed every one of his twelve letters concludes with a Latin phrase or sentence, followed by an elegant translation into English. Dickinson also adorns his text with quotations from Plutarch, Tacitus, Sallust, Cicero, Demosthenes, and Virgil. These quotations are outweighed, however, with others from Europe-

an and English authors, including Machiavelli, Rapin, Montesquieu, Locke, Pitt, Cambden, Hume, Pope, and Shakespeare. In his footnotes, Dickinson learnedly cites relevant legal decisions, but he keeps his main text completely free of these documentary authorities.

Even though many historians associate Dickinson with the religious sect to which his wife belonged, the Quakers, he was, as we have already seen, not a particularly religious man. He, nevertheless, incorporates a fair number of Biblical quotations in his *Letters*, and he particularly praises "the beautiful and emphatic language of the sacred scriptures" (Letter V). Here and elsewhere when he cites Biblical passages, however, he does not imply any authority in his texts, but uses them, as he does his classical sources, entirely for their language or their sense. Paine, who had close associations with Quakers in early life, is usually considered by critics as anti-clerical in all his writings, but in *Common Sense* he cites Scripture passages much more extensively than does Dickinson, and he appeals to these texts, moreover, as representing divine authority. He several times refers to "the will of the Almighty" and speaks of "the King of America" who "reigns above." In comparison to his Scriptural quotations, Paine's references to secular literature are spare indeed. They are limited to Milton; to three English political writers, Sir William Meredith, James Burgh, and Sir John Dalrymple; to a naval historian, John Entick; to a Quaker pamphleteer, Richard Barclay; and to an Italian moralist, Dragonetti.

Dickinson flatters his readers and countrymen, actually describing the inhabitants of the colonies as in general "more intelligent than any other people whatever" (Letter VII). Paine in some of his other works writes in a similar ingratiating strain, but in *Common Sense* he limits himself to praising the material strength of the colonies and the advantages inherent in the American continent. Dickinson's style, which has reconciliation as its aim, is appropriate for urging resistance to oppression and injustice, but it remains squarely within the limits of propriety and decorum. Dickinson does indeed make such appeals as "my dear countrymen, ROUSE yourselves, and behold the ruin hanging over your heads," but he advises these same countrymen to "exert themselves in the most firm, but most peaceable manner, for obtaining relief" (Letters II and III). Paine unequivocally places independence over reconciliation, and he adopts an extreme style to suit his message. As Dickinson's words are appropriate for resistance, Paine's are keyed to revolution. Paine does not seek merely to incite sporadic riots and tumults, but rather to turn every citizen of America against British rule. He castigates all Crown officials as murderers and colonists

friendly to them as cowards and sycophants. He affirms that "thousands are already ruined by British barbarity" and denounces George III as "the Royal Brute." Paine's free use of invective is completely alien to Dickinson's sober restraint. Both propagandists, however, rely upon feeling. After Dickinson reviles those colonists who attempted to enforce the Stamp Act as "base-spirited wretches," the closest he comes to personal abuse, he remarks that "every honest bosom, on their being mentioned, will feel what cannot be *expressed*." Paine subjects the record of British atrocities to "those feelings and affections which nature justifies, and without which, we should be incapable of discharging the social duties of life." Parenthetically, Dickinson's style in private correspondence is much less reticent than it is in his public writings. In reference to the fall in public esteem he suffered consequent to his voting against independence, he affirmed in a personal letter, "no youthfull Lover ever stript off his Clothes to step into Bed to his blooming beautiful Bride with more delight than I have cast off my Popularity."<sup>7</sup>

The publishing histories of the Farmer's *Letters* and *Common Sense* are completely different. Dickinson wrote the entire series of letters as a unit, but divided his material into twelve parts as a promotional device, assuming that he would obtain greater circulation and visibility by putting out twelve installments in newspapers than by issuing a single pamphlet. He carefully orchestrated the serial publication, fabricating objections to previous letters by fictitious readers and then providing his own answers.<sup>8</sup> Paine adopted the contrary method of publishing his entire work at one time as a pamphlet. His material is even less unified or homogeneous than that of the Farmer's *Letters* and would have been equally suited to serial publication. No one knows why he chose the pamphlet form, but it may be that he was dissatisfied with the results he had obtained from previous contributions to Philadelphia newspapers. Dickinson's *Letters* appeared in "nineteen of the twenty-three English-language newspapers published in the colonies in early 1768," and seven American pamphlet editions followed in two years.<sup>9</sup> A modern scholar has estimated that the various newspaper printings had seventy-five thousand readers and the pamphlets an additional twenty-seven thousand.<sup>10</sup> *Common Sense* appeared in at least twenty-nine issues in the colonies during the single year of 1776, and Paine himself estimated that one hundred twenty thousand copies were printed within three months. Benjamin Franklin arranged an edition of the Farmer's *Letters* in London, and this was soon translated into French. Thirty-five issues of *Common Sense* were published in Great Britain during the eighteenth century, and four separate French translations were published during the same period.<sup>11</sup>

A period of over twenty years and the stirring events of the American Revolution intervened between Dickinson's Farmer's *Letters* and the first series of his *Letters of Fabius*. The latter reveal extensive and basic resemblances to Paine's *Rights of Man*. In these later essays, Dickinson abandoned his pose of a gentleman farmer alerting his neighbors to the pressing issues of the moment and in its place adopted the character of a moralist and philosopher. As such he incorporated the method of reasoning Paine had introduced in *Common Sense* and developed in *The Rights of Man*. The resemblance goes much further than similarity of method; not only are the essential principles of the *Letters of Fabius* the same as those of *The Rights of Man*, but the two authors expressed themselves in language remarkable for its verbal affinity.

Dickinson wrote two series of Fabius letters, one in 1788 advocating the adoption of the Federal Constitution, and the other in 1797 defending the pro-French position of the Democrats against the anti-French attitudes of the Federalists. The first series was published originally in a Wilmington newspaper and was later combined with the second series in book form in 1797. The collected edition contains a number of footnotes, pointing out parallels between Dickinson's letters on the Constitution and Paine's *Rights of Man*. The editor, moreover, specifically draws attention to the close ideological and linguistic relationship between Paine and Dickinson. He explains that he has added "some notes . . . of extracts from 'The Rights of Man,' published about three years after these Letters, containing similar sentiments, expressed with a remarkable resemblance of language, especially on the two great subjects—the ORGANIZATION of a CONSTITUTION from *original* rights, and the FORMATION of GOVERNMENT from *contributed* rights, both of so much importance in laying regular FOUNDATIONS of civil society, and consequently in securing the advancement of HUMAN HAPPINESS." Dickinson himself almost certainly added these notes as well as some others from Joel Barlow and miscellaneous sources. But even though someone other than Dickinson may have been responsible for these editorial comments, Dickinson himself indicated his recognition of their appropriateness by allowing them to be reprinted in his *Political Writings* in 1801.

Many of the appended quotations from *The Rights of Man* concern the necessity of a constitution—and it is not strange that Dickinson would use similar arguments in supporting the ratification of the document drawn up by the American Constitutional Convention. Before we may affirm that Dickinson was in the same camp with Paine, however, we need to decide exactly what each meant by the term "constitution."



Paine understood a drafted document or written code setting forth in detail the principles upon which a particular political society is to be governed. Edmund Burke, as is well known, maintained on the other hand that a constitution comprises the complex of laws, charters, and precedents that the members of a political society accept as a standard for the regulation of conduct, and that have grown up gradually rather than being adopted at a precise moment in history. Practically everyone in the eighteenth century admitted the value of some kind of a constitution, with the notable exception of William Godwin, who regarded Paine's assertion that England possessed no constitution as an unmerited eulogium.

More important than the form of a constitution is its spirit. The basic issues formulated by Paine and Burke concerned the purpose for which a constitution exists. Is its main function to regulate those rights and privileges of individual men and classes of society that have been acquired by tradition; or is it to protect the rights of all men that were acquired at birth? The debate between Paine and Burke concerned precedent versus natural rights. Dickinson declared himself forthrightly with Paine on the side of natural rights against Burke and historical precedent. In a stirring passage, he proclaimed:

Trial by jury, and the dependence of taxation upon representation, those corner stones of liberty, were not obtained by a *bill of rights* or any other RECORDS, and have not been and cannot be preserved by them. They and all other rights must be preserved, by *soundness of sense* and *honesty of heart*.—Compared with *these*, what are a bill of rights or any characters drawn upon PAPER or PARCHMENT, those frail remembrances? Do we want to be reminded, that the sun enlightens, warms, invigorates, and cheers? or how horrid it would be, to have his rays intercepted by our being thrust for life, into mines or dungeons? Liberty is the sun of society. Rights are the rays.

The 1797 edition of Dickinson points out a parallel passage in the *Rights of Man*—Paine's encomium of Lafayette's address to the French National Assembly. "Instead of referring to musty RECORDS and mouldy PARCHMENTS to prove that the rights of the living are lost, 'renounced, and abdicated for ever,' by those who are now no more," the French hero "applies to the living world, and says—'Call to mind the sentiments which *nature* has engraved in the heart of every citizen, and which take a new face when they are solemnly *recognized by all*. For a nation to love *liberty*, it is sufficient that she knows it; and to be free, it is sufficient that she wills it.'" A fundamental step in Paine's argument was to trace the process by which man evolved from an individual in the state of nature to a member of civil society. Dickinson went over the same process. In his words, "Each individual—must contribute such a share of his rights, as is necessary for attaining

that *security* that is essential to freedom; and he is bound to make this contribution by the law of his nature, which prompts him to *a participated happiness*; that is, by the command of his *Creator*; therefore, *he must submit his will in what concerns all, to the will of all, that is of the whole society*." This passage is footnoted in the 1797 edition with Paine's remark that after the transformation of man as a natural individual to a member of society, "civil power, properly considered as such, is made up of the aggregate of that class of the natural rights of man, which becomes defective in the individual in point of power, and answers not his purpose, but when collected to a focus, becomes competent to the purpose of every one."

Other passages, not indicated by footnotes, reveal even closer verbal parallels. Paine distinguished between "that class of natural rights which man retains after entering into society, and those which he throws into the common stock as a member of society." Dickinson remarks that "in forming a political society, each individual contributes some of his rights, in order that he may, from a *common stock* of rights, derive *greater benefits*, than he would from merely his own." In supporting the constitution, Dickinson compared the federated states to individual men forming a society. Constantly Dickinson emphasized the individual. "A confederation is but an assemblage of *individuals*. The auspicious influence of that *law* of his nature, upon which the happiness of MAN depends in society, must attend him in confederation, or he becomes unhappy; for confederation should promote the happiness of *individuals*, or it does not *answer the intended purpose*." The footnote refers us to Paine's observation that "*individuals, themselves*, each in his own personal and sovereign right, *entered into a compact with each other* to produce a government: and this is the only mode in which governments have a right to arise, and the only principle on which they have a right to exist."

In this letter, Dickinson quotes a verse from the Old Testament that he had formerly used to good effect in the Farmer's *Letters*. When the individual realizes that his own happiness comes through submitting himself to the will of the whole society, he gains a perfect repose. Figuratively, this state exists "When every man shall sit under his vine, and under his fig tree, and none shall make him afraid." In the Farmer's letters Dickinson had emphasized a somewhat different sentiment (Letter V). Man could sit in repose under his fig tree when assured of the rights inherent in the relationship of the mother country to the colonies, particularly that great one, "the foundation of all the rest—that their property acquired with so much pain and hazard, should be disposed of by none but themselves." Paine in his last *Crisis* was much less materialistic. He depicted America "Descending to the

scenes of quiet and domestic life . . . to enjoy in her own land, and under her own vine, the sweet of her labors."

In his *Fabius* letters Dickinson stressed the necessity of tracing every social right to its ultimate source as a natural right. Even citizenship in the federal union could be so traced. "As MAN, he becomes a *citizen*; as a citizen, he becomes a *federalist*. The generation of one, is *not the destruction* of the other. He *carries* into society the naked rights received from nature. *These* thereby improved, he *carries* still forward into confederation. If that sacred law before mentioned, is not here observed, the confederation would not be *real*, but *pretended*. He would confide, and be deceived."

This principle is supported in the footnotes by three separate passages from Paine. The first is a famous denunciation of "the error of those who reason by precedent, drawn from antiquity, respecting the rights of man." They "do not go far enough into antiquity. They do not go the whole way. They stop in some of the intermediate stages of an hundred or a thousand years." In showing how civil rights originated from natural rights, Paine declared that "Man did not enter into society to become worse than he was before, nor to have fewer rights than he had before, but to have those rights better secured. His natural rights are the foundation of all his civil rights."

Dickinson in his fourth letter turned to the subject of the relationship of a constitution to civil rights. This is the most fundamental point in Paine's debate with Burke. Dickinson declared that a constitution possesses its grave and sacred character because it is a rational creation of man, designed to preserve his natural and civil rights. According to Dickinson, "A *constitution* is the *organization of the contributed rights* in society. GOVERNMENT is the EXERCISE of them. It is intended for the benefit of *the governed*; of course [it] can have no just powers but what conduce to *that end*; and the awfulness of the *trust* is demonstrated in this—that it is founded on the nature of man, that is, on the will of his MAKER, and is *therefore* sacred. It is then an offence against heaven, to violate that *trust*."

The footnotes cite Paine's insistence that "A constitution is not a thing in name only, but in fact. It has not an ideal, but a real existence; and wherever it cannot be produced in a visible form, there is none. A constitution is a thing ANTECEDENT to a government, and a government is only the creature of a constitution. The constitution of a country is not the act of its government, but of the people constituting a government."

In principle, if not in language, Dickinson's *Letters* were just as revolutionary as Paine's *Rights of Man*. Paine is famous in history for

advocating revolution in America, England and France. Dickinson, by placing final authority in the people, recognized the right of revolution as firmly and openly as ever Paine did. If the organization of a constitution were defective, he argued, it could be amended. "A good constitution promotes, but not always produces a good administration." But in the event that, despite everything, a bad administration should come into control, Dickinson's answer was unequivocal: "Let the *fasces* be lowered before—the *supreme sovereignty* of the people. It is *their duty to watch, and their right to take care, that the constitution be preserved*; or in the Roman phrase on perilous occasions—to *provide, that the republic receive no damage*." This is buttressed in the notes by a quotation from Locke as well as one from the second part of *The Rights of Man*. According to Paine, when the controlling power is vested in a constitution, "it has the nation for its support, and the natural and controlling powers are together. The laws which are enacted by governments, control men only as individuals, but the nation, through its constitution, controls the whole government, and has a natural ability so to do. The final controlling power, therefore, and the original constituting power, are one and the same power."

In addition to these similarities in idea, the language of Paine and Dickinson reveals a strong resemblance in treating the subject of the origins of political union. Both speak of it as a natural process of cohesion and both use the somewhat unusual verb (in this sense) "to condense." In speaking of the coming into being of modern republics, Dickinson remarked that "their institutions consist of old terrors tissue with hasty inventions, somewhat excusable, as the will of the Romans, made with arms in their hands. Some of them were *condensed*, by dangers. They are still compressed by them into a sort of union. Their well-known transactions witness, that *their connection is not enough compact and arranged*. They have all suffered, or *are suffering* through *that defect*. Their existence seems to depend more upon others, than upon themselves." Paine used the same imagery: "If we consider what the principles are that first *condense* man into society, and what the motive is that regulates their mutual intercourse afterwards, we shall find, by the time we arrive at what is called government, that nearly the whole of the business is performed by the natural operation of the parts upon each other."<sup>12</sup>

Previous writers on Dickinson, assuming that the series of Fabius letters represents a conservative point of view, have been at a loss to understand Dickinson's presumed conversion to Jeffersonian liberalism in the second series written in 1797. One cannot doubt that when the Constitution was presented for ratification, Dickinson was indeed

a pronounced Federalist. But he was a Federalist in Paine's sense of one who believed in "cementing the Union by a general government operating equally over all the States, in all matters that embraced the common interest." In this sense, Paine declared that he himself "ought to stand first on the list of Federalists." Even though frontier farmers in the western parts of Pennsylvania condemned the constitution and its advocates as "the pillars of slavery, tyranny and despotism," other citizens of the state, such as Paine, equally concerned for the welfare of the common man, saw the necessity of the Constitution and campaigned energetically in its behalf. Dickinson and Paine based their support of the constitution on identical grounds. There is no contradiction, therefore, between Dickinson supporting the principles of federalism in 1788 and enlisting himself nine years later among the proponents of Jeffersonian philosophy. The parallels with the *Rights of Man* in the first series of Fabius letters show that Dickinson did not go through a drastic conversion between 1788 and 1797. Indeed, there was little change in his essential political philosophy ever since the publication of his *Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer* in 1767-68.

In conclusion, historians have greatly exaggerated the ideological divergences between Dickinson and Paine. The Farmer's *Letters* and *Common Sense* do not use the same propaganda techniques, but they share essentially the same political principles. In later publications, moreover, the ideology of the two authors is identical.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Vindication," in Charles J. Stillé, *The Life and Times of John Dickinson* (1891), p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Miller Papers (Princeton Library), cited by David L. Jacobson in *John Dickinson and the Revolution in Pennsylvania 1764-1776*, Univ. of California Publications in History (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Jacobson, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> *An Address . . . Barbadoes*, 1776, p. 262, cited by Jacobson, p. 262.

<sup>5</sup> Jacobson, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Carl F. Kaestle, "The Public Reaction to John Dickinson's *Farmer's Letters*," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 78, Pt. 2 (1968), 345.

<sup>7</sup> To Charles Thompson, August 7, 1776, New-York Historical Society *Collections*, II (1878), 29.

<sup>8</sup> Kaestle, p. 339.

<sup>9</sup> Kaestle, pp. 325-26.

<sup>10</sup> Kaestle, p. 353.

<sup>11</sup> For the British editions I am relying on Richard Gimbel, *Thomas Paine: A Bibliographical Check List of "Common Sense"* (New Haven, 1956); for the

French, I am relying on A. O. Aldridge, "The Influence of Thomas Paine in the United States, England, France, Germany and South America," in W. P. Friederich, ed., *Proceedings of the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association* (Chapel Hill, 1959), II, 369-83.

<sup>12</sup> Even though Dickinson's first series of letters was originally printed before *The Rights of Man*, the publishing of parallel passages in 1797 was not intended to suggest that Paine had written in any way under the influence of Dickinson. Paine left for France in April 1787, and there is little likelihood that Dickinson's letters, written in the following year, were known anywhere in Europe.

### *February's Observation*

You lads and Lasses would repine,  
Should we forget St. *Valentine*:  
When Young men do present their Loves  
With Scarfs, with Ribons, & with Gloves,  
And to shew manners not forgot all  
Give them a lick under the Snot-gall,  
Then one a Cursie dops anon,  
And smiling says, *I thank thee, John.*

On the Twenty eighth day of this month is like to be a very comfortable smell of *Pancakes* and *Fritters*. The Nights are still cold and long, which may cause great Conjunction betwixt the Male and Female Planets of our sublunary Orb, the effects whereof may be seen about nine months after, and portend great charges of Midwife, Nurse, and Naming the Bantling.

### *MARCH*

Now if thy Body be not well  
This month for Physick doth excel;  
But choose a Doctor skill'd in Art,  
Not *Quacks* growing rich by others smart.

If some great Person do not die this month, either in *Europe, Asia, Africa, or America*, let them light Tobacco, or make Bum-Fodder with our Observations.